

The Importance of Peer Support in Fostering Interdisciplinary and Inter Institutional Collaboration among Post-Graduate and Research Students

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I. Introduction:

The importance of peer supports in fostering interdisciplinary and inter institutional collaboration among post graduate and research students and between post graduate and research students.

Man has reached this stage of progress and achievement through interaction & cooperation with one another. Group is a powerful tool for influencing, moulding and developing the behaviour of its members. It is a great resource for meeting the needs of the individual. Through different activities planned by the group members many desirable qualities and skills can be developed. The change in the members of the group are directly and indirectly goes to the wider society and influences the whole world. To mean something in the world, to have a place in this world is the greatest and powerful urge of every person. Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs explains this fact. Competence, confidence, self esteem development etc are best achieved through the groups ,including family ,friends and class mates.

Kingman and Sidman (1935) have noted that the purpose of group is to develop the people. Development of the people is achieved through the group. Large heartedness which is the panacea for all sorts of problems is the result of small group membership and activities.

Groups have the power to build people. Growth of people is achieved when we turn out to be a "ladder" to the other person. This role sincerely done makes us also more powerful confident and satisfied. We sometimes forget that it is the psychological bond that is more

powerful than blood bond. When the NACC Team came to our institute one of the members in the team in the concluding speech told us to consider each student as our own “children”.

The principles of group work was accepted in India as study area for post graduate students in social work when it was accepted as a profession in India. But recently its use or acceptance as a means for financial, spiritual and social empowerment and development has become very clear. There is an increased use of groups to engage people in action to bring about changes for themselves and others. According to Helen U. Phillops Group work is “knowledge in action”. Self help groups are really a structure to which the pouring of group work principles can turn out to be a very powerful stimulant. In the group a synergic effect occurs when persons interact and that oneness creates a powerful unit which is more powerful than the members standing alone. The whole is more powerful than the sum of its parts Two ladies from Kerala got a chance to go to Germany because of the relationship that was established in the self help groups. The “ladder” or leader has a helping or facilitating role The group can engage the participants in the development of its members as an instrument for help, action or change. Theodore New Comb in 1938 showed that the needs of individuals could be fulfilled and people could grow individually through group associations.

Fritz Redl has picked up on the phenomenon of group contagion in his work. When few people come together and transform into a group it turns them into a collective mind. This makes them feel think and act in a manner quite different from that which each of them would have felt, thought or acted alone. Durkheim (1951) emphasised the power which individuals get when they develop attachment, some sense of self worth and belonging. The group bond gives them affection, concern and understanding which makes them empathetic towards others. Empathy distinguishes man from animal. The most important contribution the small group can provide to the members is the healthy mental attitude or atmosphere which the small group can give to the individuals in the group. In such situation the student gets the confidence to perform studies which the other group members are doing. The intimacy gives them chances to reveal their personal and intimate problems-relaxation and acceptance of themselves and others. Values, beliefs and behaviour develops from interaction with others. An individual’s view of self, an idea of his own worth develops from association with others. Treatment of teachers, peers and families affects the individual’s self esteem.

Many of the students who come to post graduate course would expect a good job. This needs good communication both in local language and English. The reason for China's many achievements in the world is because of their hard work and the great effort the Country is making in improving communication in English. Because of many reasons many of our students are hesitant to speak .It can be the fear of making mistakes in pronunciation or grammar. Luckily in each class there will be a few who are little fluent in language. They can be identified and they can be stimulants in helping the others to improve their communication skill. Introducing themselves in the small groups in English and encouraging them to open up, is best possible in small groups. They come to know their own weaknesses, plus points, study habits and the positive attitude of their own class mates which gives them the hope and confidence to improve. The small group can be the bridge from the person to the larger society. The larger society sometimes is greatly influenced by the achievement of the small group.

Groups can be useful for various aspects of growth and change. It teaches us to relate to other people, to interact with others, to give and receive support and to express themselves more assertively. Groups help people to practice effective way of communicating by giving effective experience.

To make the groups effective the position of the chairs, provision of a table etc. determine the manner and pattern by which members speak to and interact and communicate with each other in verbal and nonverbal ways. As a result of these interactions the emergence of leadership, interpersonal alliances, influence of behaviour and other products of interaction occurs. Keeping records is a key area of evaluation .the group is expected to accomplish some goals with in a given period. Planning and achievement of planned goals makes the group more attractive to the members. The groups give resources, acknowledgment, prestige and rewards to its members.

Thus the group gives an opportunity for individual growth and group growth. Proper and systematic planning by giving importance to each member is essential. Groups should clarify misunderstandings, it should also see that no member is ridiculed for what they communicate.

They help people to rehearse behaviours they have not been able to utilize prior to group membership. Groups help in creating a setting for persons to engage in interaction with

people different from themselves. It serves as a context for various aspects of growth and change. Research has shown that groups composed of odd numbered sizes (3,5,7) tend to be characterised by an atmosphere of harmony and cooperation while even numbered sizes of groups (4,6,8) tend to be characterized by hostility and disagreement among members. Main energy of the group is communication verbal and nonverbal. If members will control each other's behaviour it will enable the person to handle the situation more confidently.

Hierarchical differences and barriers of power are less when groups consists of students only. More open communication occurs in these type of circumstances. According to Hall and Jaugietis (2010) peer study is effective in enhancing student performance. This method helps to improve student experience of university life and to reduce attrition. In some cases a certain degree of peer learning in the form of engaging with professional environment is a component (Wellington and Sikes, 2006). Here the experience is often connected with skills acquisition for employment (Mowbray and Halse, 2010).

Lea and Nicoll's (2002) idea of "distributed learning" to refer to networks of learning in which learners take up opportunities in a variety of ways without necessary involvement from teachers or supervisors. Bond and Lee (2005) mentions peer learning as a two way reciprocal among students and significant others. Peer relations are not only about overcoming isolation and loneliness of doctoral students, but, indeed an active space and site of learning.

MeCCSA Post-Graduate Network

This is UK's subject association for media, communication and cultural studies. This net work aims to bring together postgraduate and post-doctoral researchers from different intellectual traditions and cultural backgrounds in order to form research, and teaching and learning net works and also ensure peer support.

1. Place postgraduate researchers in touch with media, communication and cultural studies.
2. Provision of a national forum for postgraduates to participate in workshops, seminars related to teaching learning and research.
3. Efforts will be made to bring together members of the postgraduate community in order to debate contemporary issues in media, communication and cultural studies

4. Creation of a supportive environment where postgraduates can establish valuable contacts for future.

It is through the organisation of an annual post graduate conference that these goals are primarily achieved. It was a way to learn about academic affairs. Being Part of organising peer support structures was found to be extremely useful. There are some who did not see it as very beneficial also. Post graduate research supervisors opined that it was of great benefit to their student's learning journey. One of them told it made their students more open and willing to put themselves out there at conferences. Conferences gave them much more confidence and prepared them eager to try new things. It also provided a chance for exchange of information, contacts and as a first chance for presentation of work in progress. Peer net working helped in alleviating experience of isolation, loneliness and problems of self efficacy. It was noticed that the greater the involvement of participants in the net work, the greater the benefit they derive from the net work.

Leng Hui (2007) mentions the apparent success of group work in the bilingual context and comment on the impact that this has had on program design and pedagogy. Group work is a general teaching strategy. Here students work together in face to face interaction with direct teacher supervision to achieve a common goal. According to Killen (2003) it is to shift students away from passive learning. According to Freiberg & Driscoll (2005). The main benefit of group work is that students are actively engaged in learning. Group work activates the students prior knowledge says Killen (2003) From the 1990s cooperative learning emerged as more specialized form of group learning .Here the structure and purpose of the teacher is to develop positive interdependence among group members (Johnson and Johnson,1999). The introduction of group work in schools and Universities is supported by the rise of individual and social constructivism as powerful theories of learning.

Students are actively engaged in learning. This is the main benefit of group work. This activates the student's prior knowledge (Killen, 2003). Interaction, face to face enable students to build on the ideas of others. According to Chaffee, 1992) active learning, involving interactive teaching, student led discussion and stimulating projects are mainly at the heart of effective and lasting education. In small groups students develop essential social and emotional skills which are so essential in modern context. High level of cooperation that is achieved in small groups enables the members to handle interpersonal problems rather than to avoid them and do it constructively and creatively.

A Group is a place to share experiences and get feedback, a place to learn skills for dealing with people, such as communication skills, sharing of advice on how to deal with situations. It can be a place to relate class material to the real world situation. Here we can have an open discussion on so that we can learn from others experience. Here we get an opportunity to realize that we are not alone in the problems and that some things are normal experiences. Group is a safe place for self exploration.

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